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AN
ENQUIRY,
CONCERNING THE
PRINCIPLES of TASTE,
AND
OF THE ORIGIN
OF OUR
IDEAS of BEAUTY, &c.

Sunt certi denique fines,
Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum.
Hor.

L O N D O N:
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TO MRS. MONTAGU.

MADAM,

WERE I not prompted by gratitude, admiration, and affection, to dedicate to you the best produce of my abilities, which I imagine this to be, yet, as the subject, of which it particularly treats, is moral excellence, the universal voice of mankind, with whom your very name is synonymous with virtue itself, must plead my apology for taking this liberty.

Besides, madam, it was natural for me, as an author, to wish to avail myself of the advantage, which this address affords me, of prepossessing the minds of my readers with an example of that perfection to which all my arguments tend, as a preparative, or aid, to their better comprehending my meaning.

The influence of virtue is every way beneficial! Your character not only secures me from all imputation of flattery, but this public avowal of my admiration of its excellence conveys an honourable testimony of the consistency of my principles; having endeavoured to inculcate, that the love and esteem of true virtue is true honour. And I may add, that the sweet gratification I feel, in the indulging the strongest and best propension of my nature, in
thus

(v)

thus expatiating in its praise, is true pleasure,
true happiness.

I am, Madam,

Your obliged,

Most obedient,

And most humble, servant,

The A U T H O R.

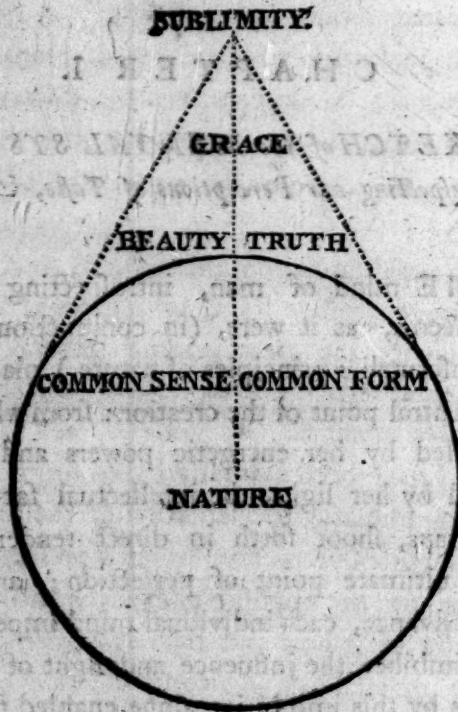
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CHAPTER I.

*A SKETCH of the MENTAL SYSTEM
respecting our Perceptions of Taste, &c.*

THE mind of man, introspecting itself, seems, as it were, (in conjunction with the inscrutable principles of nature,) placed in the central point of the creation: from whence, impelled by her energetic powers and illumined by her light, the intellectual faculties, like rays, shoot forth in direct tendency to their ultimate point of perfection; and, as they advance, each individual mind imperceptibly imbibes the influence and light of each, and is by this imbibition alone enabled to approach it.

But, though the light of nature and of reason direct the human mind to perfection, or true good, yet, being in its progress perpetually impeded by adventitious causes, casual occurrences,



rences, &c. &c. which induce false opinions of good and evil, its progressive powers generally stop at a middle point between mere uncultivated nature and perfection, a medium which constitutes what we call common sense, and which, in degree, seems as distant from the perfection of the mental faculties as common form is from the perfection of form, *beauty*.

On meditating on this subject, and marking the progressive stages or degrees of human excellence, the great leading general truths, or mental rests, as I may call them, *the common, the beautiful, the graceful, and the sublime*, I have been naturally led to form a kind of diagrammatic representation of their respective distances, &c. &c. which I present to my reader on the opposite page, requesting him to refer to it now and then as he goes on, in order to facilitate his comprehension of my meaning.

And here it may be necessary to premise, that, however whimsical and absurd this delineation may appear to my reader, something analogous to the thought may be found in the

works of many eminent philosophers, particularly in those of Bacon * and of Locke: † the latter suggesting that the whole system of morality might be reduced to mathematical demonstration; and the former, in his treatise on the Advancement of Learning, gives a description of the stages of science very much resembling my delineation of the stages of intellectual perfection, or taste.

It could have been no dishonour to me to have been led by such conductors! Yet, as the truth cannot dishonour me neither, I must aver, that my little system was projected, and brought to the exact state it now is in, without my having the least apprehension that any thing similar had been suggested before by any person whatever; nor have I, in consequence of the discovery I have lately made of the opinions of these respectable authors, added or omitted a single thought in my treatise. But to return from my digression.

In

* Advancement of Learning, Book 2d.

† Essay on human Understanding, Chap. 3d, Book the 4th, and Chap. 12th, same Book, Sect. 8th.

In the exact center of my circle of humanity, I have placed nature, or the springs of the intellectual powers, which tend, in a straight line, to its boundary; and, on its boundary, I have placed demonstrable beauty and truth, and the utmost power of rules; and, midway, I have placed common sense and common form, half deriving their existence from pure nature, and half from its highest cultivation, as far as art or rules can teach. A conjunction which would itself be the perfection of humanity, but that it is mixed with all that is not nature, and all that is not art, and thereby made mediocrity, i. e. *common sense*.

The intellectual powers, arriving at the limit of my common circle, i. e. at the limit of the basis of my pyramidal system, where I have placed the fixed proportions of beauty and of truth, (if they progress,) mount up as a flame, with undulating * motion, refining as they advance, and terminate in the pinnacle, or ultimate point, *sublimity*; forming in the imagination the figure of a pyramid, or cone, from

* I use that expression, because it is the peculiar motion of grace as well as of a flame.

from the limit of whose base, (on which, as I have before observed, I have placed demonstrable truth and beauty, the utmost power of rules, &c.) from that limit up to the ultimate point of sublimity, I call the region of intellectual pleasure, genius, or taste; and in its center I place grace, whose influence pervades, cheers, and nourishes, every part of it, an object which, in this ideal region, is similar in its situation and degree to that of common sense in the common or fundamental region. Grace seems to partake of the perception both of beauty and of sublimity, as common sense partakes of nature and of art. Grace is the characteristic object or general form of the ideal region, and its perception is the general limit of the powers of imagination or taste. Few, very few, attain to the point of sublimity; the *ne plus ultra* of human conception! the alpha and omega. The sentiment of sublimity sinks into the source of nature, and that of the source of nature mounts to the sentiment of sublimity, each point seeming to each the cause and the effect; the origin and the end!

Having

Having thus drawn the outline of my pyramidal mental system, I propose to expatiate a little on each point or stage throughout the great characteristic line of intellectual power.

The first point. The exact center, *nature*, or the origin of our intellectual faculties, admits of no investigation, its idea, as I have observed before, loses itself in the sentiment of sublimity, and we see nothing; and therefore I pass on to an object which is perceptible, *the common general character of humanity, exterior and interior*. I have placed them on a line, because their ideas are so analogous, that they unite in one.

Section 1. *Common Sense and common Form.*

Perfection seems to be the ground-work both of common sense and of common form; and, what prevents each from being perfect, is the adventitious blemishes, the additions to, and the diminutions from, what is perfect, making the too little and the too large. But, these defects being distributed in small portions throughout the general common form and common mind, they constitute an object, whether

ther visible or intellectual, between perfection and imperfection, namely, that of mediocrity, neither exciting admiration nor disgust. And, as experience gives the general idea of the common and true appearance of the human form, as well to the rustic as to the most enlightened philosopher, so consequently does it enable him to see deformity, or what is an unusual appearance in that form.

But, though unusual defects seem to be evident to every eye, it is only to the man of taste and nice discernment that the same degree of unusual beauties are equally perceptible; which corresponds with my opinion, that the ground-work of humanity is perfection, and that its blemishes only tinge its pure white, not discolour it so much, but, when held at a distance, i. e. in abstract idea, it is still a white, like a sheet of paper, or cloth of the most perfect white, regularly checkered over with a variety of figures of every colour, and placed at a distance, appearing to the eye a white, a mezzo common white; and, as any unusual figure, I mean unusually large and opaque, on this mezzo ground, would be more conspicuous

conspicuous than any of a greater degree of transparency or a more perfect white could be by an absence of any of the figures; so any degree of deformity is more opposite to the general common form than beauty, and any degree of insanity is more opposite to common sense than intellectual excellence.

And, (to continue my allusion,) as those tints, or blemishes, which obscure the ground, must be discharged to make a perfect white, so must the artist, in creating beauty, discharge the blemishes that tinge and obscure the human form, and which give it the character of mediocrity, till the perfect white, or total absence of defect, or beauty, result.

Common sense seems to be diffusive truth, and common form diffusive beauty; and, as this diffusion is always existing with us, externally and internally, it is no wonder that we should more easily perceive what is in opposition to it, *evil*, than what is in unison with it, *good*.

On a line with common form and common sense I place common ease of body and of mind: unfelt health, unfelt good, or that ari-

ling to the degree of *satisfaction* and *content* ;
 in *fine*, whatever we call *commonly* good, and
 requisite for the well-being of humanity.

Section 2. *Beauty and Truth,*

I mean that beauty which is demonstrable truth, and that truth which is demonstrable beauty. *Exactitude. Completion. The just medium. The satisfactory rest of the mind. Perfection.* A point, indeed, in which the mind cannot rest ! It must go forward or backward. If the latter, it relapses into the dominion of error ; if the former, it assumes the charms of *design*, or *intention*. The artist, arrived at the ultimate limit of rules, or demonstrable truth, stands, as it were, between the visible and invisible world ; between that of sense and intellect ; the common and the uncommon ; and his productions will be a conjunction of both. He looks back through all the variety of common nature, and reviews, through the medium of truth and beauty, the various objects it exhibits ; and on its spotless ground, i. e. the abstract idea of nature without defects, which can only exist in idea, he arranges those
 objects,

objects, so as they may best produce the effects he aims at in his art. He does not attempt to obliterate any character in the common circle of nature; but, following her own œconomy, he endeavours, by juxtaposition, &c. to make each subservient to each in creating delight, and giving beauty to the *whole*. But, to descend from the abstract general idea to the particular idea of beauty, or idea of a particular form:

We discard every thing, that is not beauty, to compose beauty; but every thing that is not beauty is not therefore deformity. The wrong we see in each individual we do not call deformity: when it is so, it stands on the limit of the common circle, in opposition to beauty.

From common form seem to originate beauty and deformity; and, as they recede from each other in opposite directions, they become less and less like their parent, *common form*, but never totally unlike; for it is their likeness to that form that constitutes the one beauty, and the other deformity; for, were there no resemblance in deformity to the common form, it would be a different species, and no longer

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disgust; and none in beauty, it would no longer please.

There is no particular common form, but which, to create beauty, an artist, who studies the perfection of the human form, must improve in some, if not in every part; to effect which, considered as mere form only, rules will suffice, but, considered as grace, it must express a sentiment that no rules can give!

That all feel the same sentiment of admiration for that which they think the most perfect, however the objects may differ, has induced some to believe that beauty is an arbitrary idea, and that it exists only in the imagination! But does it follow, that, because it is not possible for the savage or the man of taste to judge of any object but as experience enables him to judge, that therefore there is no preeminence in that form which is beauty to the one above that which is beauty to the other?

Somewhere there must exist, whether perceived or not, the perfection, or highest point of excellence of the human form respecting proportion; and somewhere there must exist,

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or does at times exist, the highest excellence of its expression, i. e. the moral charm of the human countenance, *grace*.

The artist, who has only seen the beauty of his own nation, will from that form his standard of perfection. But, when he comes to extend his enquiry, when he has viewed the beauty of other nations, particularly that form and that expression which the Grecian artists (who were probably on a line with the Grecian philosophers) modelled from their ideas of beauty! he will quit his partiality for the beauty of his own country, and prefer that of the Grecian, which I imagine is preferable to that of the whole world! The only criterion to prove it so, I mean its form, would be to select from every nation the most perfect in it, and from that number to choose the most perfect, were this possible to be done, respecting the external form of beauty: it could not respecting the internal expression of beauty, *grace*; for who shall be the world's arbiter of the ne plus ultra of grace!

That the artists of all ages and of all nations have terminated their enquiries after beauty in
that

that of the Grecian form is the highest proof that can be given of its superior excellence to that of all the world !

Common form, as I have observed before, is so much nearer beauty than deformity, that it is, in abstract idea, the model to compose beauty of form from. The *universal* appearance of nature is, to every eye, right, fit, faultless, &c. therefore, if every part of the copy be the same, particularly, I mean, in the *human* form, beauty of form must result.

The beauty of every part of the human body, forming a *perfect* whole, is analogous to an instrument of music in perfect concord, and mere exactitude of proportion in its parts, exclusive of the idea of mind, would, I imagine, have no more effect upon the spectator than the mere concord of the strings of an instrument has on the hearer ; it amounts to no more than blameless right, nor, till influenced by sentiment, can it go farther,

But, as we are incapable of separating the idea of the human form from the human mind, and as the touch of an instrument in perfect concord gives a presentiment of harmony, so
does

does the perception of the concordance of the parts of a beautiful form give a perception of grace. The mind, as I have observed before, cannot rest in fixed perfection, the *spotless white*; and its natural transition from beauty must be into the region of grace.

Section 3. Grace.

The principles, which constitute grace, genius, or taste, are one; which is denominated grace in the object, genius in the production of the object, and taste in the perception of it.

The existence of grace *seems* to depend more upon the character of mental than of corporeal beauty. All its motions seem to indicate and to be regulated by the utmost delicacy of sentiment! I have placed it between the highest sentiment of the human mind, *sublimity*, that no rules can teach, and the highest sentiment that rules can teach, *exact beauty*; the two extremes of the *vrai réel* and the *vrai idéal*. Grace seems, as it were, to hang between the influence of both; the irregular sublime giving character and relief to the negative and determined qualities of beauty; and beauty,

i. e.

i. e. truth, confining within due bounds the eccentric qualities of sublimity, forming, both to sight and in idea, orderly variety, *the waving line*, neither straight nor crooked. The waving line is the symbol, or memento, as I may say, of grace, wherever it is seen, in whatever form, animate or inanimate; and may be justly styled the line of taste or grace!

The perception of grace seems not to be intirely new nor intirely familiar to us; but is, as it were, what we have had a presentiment of in the mind, without examining it, and which the graceful object, or action, &c. calls forth to our view. Being so much our own idea, we like to behold it, to dwell upon it; and yet, not being a familiar idea, it creates a pleasing mild degree of admiration.

Grace seems half celestial; for all the virtues accompany, indeed compose, the perception; for none, I imagine, can have a perception of grace that has none of the charms of virtue.

The sentiment of grace, caused by the motion of beauty, music, poetry, beneficence, compassion, &c. may be ranked as the highest intellectual pleasure the mind is capable of perceiving.

perceiving, and brings with it a sort of undetermined consciousness of the delicacy of our own perceptions in making the discovery, a degree of that glorying that Longinus observes always accompanies the perception of the sublime.

You can no more define grace than you can happiness. The mind cannot so stedfastly behold it as to investigate its real properties. Grace is indeed the point of happiness in the ideal region, both because it arises spontaneously, without effort, &c. and because it seems partly *within* our own power, and partly *without* it.

As common sense, in my fundamental circle, seems diffusive truth, so grace, in my ideal circle, seems diffusive sublimity; every perception of the former seems to be tinged, as it were, with the colour of the latter.

Section 4. *Sublimity.*

Where pure grace ends, the awe of the sublime begins, composed of the influence of pain, of pleasure, of grace, and deformity, playing into each other, that the mind is una-

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ble to determine which to call it, pain, pleasure, or terror. Without a conjunction of these powers there could be no sublimity.

Those only who have passed through the degrees, *common sense, truth, and grace*, i.e. the sentiment of grace, can have a sentiment of sublimity. It is the mild admiration of grace raised to *wonder and astonishment*; to a sentiment of *power* out of *our power* to produce or control. Grace must have been as familiar to the intellect, in order to discover sublimity, as common sense in the common region must have been to the discovery of truth and beauty. In fine, genius, or taste, which is the sentiment of grace, and which I have called the common sense of the ideal region, can alone discover the true sublime.

It is a pinnacle of beatitude, bordering upon horror, deformity, madness! an eminence from whence the mind, that dares to look farther, is lost! It seems to stand, or rather to waver, between certainty and uncertainty, between security and destruction. It is the point of terror, of undetermined fear, of undetermined power!

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The idea of the supreme Being is, I imagine, in every breast, from the clown to the greatest philosopher, his point of sublimity!

OF THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEAS OF
BEAUTY.

I propose to treat the principles of beauty as it is the common form, and to show that the common eye, in its daily call in common life, is determined to the common mind. It is evident that the call is not given, given from a determined form, even as the object, and the perception, that

There are good and bad
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But, though all truth is given into one truth, one beauty, one good, at all colours resolve into one light, though the intellectual, intellectual colours, classes, or leading principles of science, and physical, the mental, and metaphysical, etc. etc. resolve into intellectual light, beauty, or good; it is, I imagine, the more truth, that is the characteristic of beauty: for were we to multiply the pleasing emotions we feel at the sight of beauty, we should

CHAPTER II.

*On the ORIGIN of our IDEAS of
BEAUTY.*

IN proportion as the principles of beauty exist in the common form, undetermined to the common eye, so do they exist in common sense, undetermined to the common mind. It is cultivation that calls them into view, gives them a determined form, creates the object, and the perception, that

‘ Truth and good are one,
And beauty dwells in them, and they in her.’

AKENSIDE.

But, though all truth resolves into one truth, one beauty, one good, as all colours resolve into one light; though the scientific intellectual colours, classes, or leading principles of science, the *physical*, the *moral*, the *metaphysical*, &c. &c. resolve into intellectual light, beauty, or good; it is, I imagine, the moral truth, that is the characteristic truth of beauty: for, were we to analyse the pleasing emotions we feel at the sight of beauty, we should,

should, I imagine, find them composed of our most refined moral affections; and hence the universal interesting charm of beauty. And, as those affections refine by culture, hence the different degrees of the sentiments which beauty creates in the rustic, and in the man of taste. The former perceives only the physical charm of beauty, the freshness of colour, the bloom of youth, &c. but, to the man of taste, the physical pleases only through the medium of the moral: *the body charms because the soul is seen*; beauty, in his breast, is the source from whence *endless streams of fair ideas flow*, extending throughout the whole region of taste, no object of which but is more or less related to the principles of human beauty. But taste, though a subject almost inseparable from that of beauty, I must forbear to enlarge upon in this chapter, as I propose to make it the particular subject of my next.

It is but at that period, at which we begin to perceive the charms of moral virtue, that we begin to perceive the real charms of beauty. It is true, a man may attain, by experience, the knowledge of its just proportions; without

out that concomitant sentiment. He may be unconscious of the characteristic moral charm resulting from the whole. And an artist, I imagine, by the habitual practice of the rules which constitute beauty, may produce forms which charm the moral sense of others, without being conscious of it himself; the utmost limit of the rules of the imitative arts being so intimately united with the intuitive principles of taste, or refined moral sense, that the mind in general cannot distinguish where the one ends or the other begins. The artist, who separates them, *leans on the second cause* instead of the first.

As the strongest proof that the moral sense is the governing principle of beauty, we may remark, that the human form, from infancy to old age, has its peculiar beauty annexed to it from the virtue or affection that nature gives it, and which it exhibits in the countenance. The negative virtue, innocence, is the beauty of the child. The more formed virtues, benevolence, generosity, compassion, &c. are the virtues of youth, and its beauty. The fixed and determined virtues, justice, temperance,

rance, fortitude, &c. compose the beauty of manhood. The philosophic and religious cast of countenance is the beauty of old age. Now, were any of these expressions misapplied, i. e. commuted, they would disgust rather than please: without congruity there could be no virtue; without virtue, no beauty, no sentiment of taste.

And thus the beauty of each sex is seen only through the medium of the virtues belonging to each. The beauty of the masculine sex is seen only through the medium of the masculine virtues; the beauty of the feminine only through the medium of the feminine. The moral sense gives each its distinct portion of the same virtues, but draws a line which neither can pass without a diminution of their specific beauty. The softness and mildness of the feminine expression would be displeasing in a man. The robust and determined expression of the rigid virtues, justice, fortitude, &c. would be displeasing in a woman. However perfect the Form, if an incongruity that touches the well-being of humanity mingles with the idea, the Form will not afford the pleasing perception

ception of beauty: though the eye may be capable of seeing its regularity, &c. so far is it from pleasing, that it is the more disgusting from its semblance to virtue, because that that semblance is a contradiction to her laws.

May it not be owing to these expressions, so familiar to every eye, that the general sense of good taste eternally exists? They are the legible characters of human excellence, nowhere visible but in the human countenance, every observation of which improves and confirms the moral sentiment, or image of beauty, implanted by nature in the mind of man.

The origin of the idea of beauty is the same in every breast, savage and civilized. Every nation's characteristic Form or expression of beauty will be a representation, or portrait, of their characteristic virtue, their happiness, their good. Thus, in the opinion of the wild savage, that face or form will be the most beautiful that assimilates with his idea of savage virtues, corporeal strength, courage, &c. *perfections that are placed in bones and nerves*: as that of the most cultivated nations, witness the Grecians, will indicate or portray
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the most refined mental virtues. And hence we may conclude, if there be any dignity, any truth, any beauty, in virtue, there must be a *real* difference, a *superior* and *inferior* characteristic power of pleasing in the exterior of the human form.

It is cultivation that gives birth to beauty as well as to virtue, by calling forth the visible object to correspond with the invisible intellectual object. In the face or form of an idiot, or the lowest rustic, there is no beauty; and, supposing a nation of idiots, and that they never could improve in mental beauty, they never could, I imagine, improve in corporeal, even though their natural form was upon an equality with the rest of mankind; for, without sentiment, they could not only be incapable of expressing any sentiment analogous to beauty, but, wanting the surrounding influence of a moral system, i. e. of the general influence of education on the exterior, they could not suppress or veil a semblance incongruous with beauty. What no person felt no person could teach.

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In cultivated nations, every precept for exterior appearance, from the first rudiments of the dancing-master to the motion of grace, has for its object *mind*, that is, a desire to impress upon the spectator a favourable idea of our mental character; but, passed the true point of cultivation, they lose with the sentiment of mental excellence that of true beauty; witness the exterior artificial appearance of humanity in a neighbouring nation, which probably is on a par with the most uncultivated rustic. The one does not enough for nature, the other too much. But, as the former has an object before him, to which nature herself directs him, the other is receding from it; and, as it is more agreeable, more easy, and more natural, to the human mind, to learn than to unlearn, I should sooner expect the most uncultivated nation, the negro excepted, to arrive at taste in true beauty than them. The negro-race seems to be the farthest removed from the line of true cultivation of any of the human species; their defect of form and complexion being, I imagine, as strong an obstacle to their acquiring true taste (the produce of mental cultivation) as any natural defect

defect they may have in their intellectual faculties. For if, as I have observed, the total want of cultivation would preclude external beauty, the total want of external beauty would preclude the power of cultivation. It appears to me inconceivable, that the negro-race, supposing their mental powers were upon a level with other nations, could ever arrive at true taste, when their eye is accustomed *only* to objects so diametrically opposite to taste as the face and form of negroes are ! Our being used or not used to the object cannot make us perceive any similarity in the lineaments of their countenance to the lineaments, if I may so say, of our refined virtues and affections, which alone constitute beauty ; and therefore I am induced to believe that they are a lower order of human beings than the Europeans.

Beauty is an assemblage of every human charm ; yet what we call the *agreeable* is often more captivating.

The agreeable, in person, is composed of beauties and defects, as is the common form, but differently composed. The beauties and defects of the latter are blended into the idea

of mediocrity ; those of the former are always distinct and perceptible, contrasting each other, they engage the attention, and create a kind of pleasing *re-creation* to the mental faculties ; and, in proportion as we can bring them to unite with our governing principles of pleasure, they create affection, which gives the person a more fascinating charm than beauty itself.

It is the mental character that is the moving principle of affection ; and any strong peculiarity, that contradicts not the moral sense, i. e. that is not *unnatural*, gives the object an accessory charm, and raises the affection to passion. The object is at once the common and the uncommon ; an union, which constitutes all we call excellent, all we admire !

The perception of the charms of the agreeable seem to be wrought up to excellence by the operation of our own powers. We ourselves have blended its beauties and defects into the sentiment of beauty, *pleasure* ; and hence, probably, the strength and durability of the passion which it creates. Beauty, on the contrary, is composed to our hands, *full,*
perfect,

perfect, and *intire*; its idea is also a compound of the common and the uncommon, being at once like and unlike the general form; but inherently it has no contrast, and therefore affords no recreation, no pleasing exercise, to the mental faculties; there is nothing to re-create, nothing to wish; and hence the instability of the passion which it inspires. Perfect beauty is, like perfect happiness, lost as soon as it is attained.

It is, I imagine, to the principles of the masculine and the feminine character, that we owe the perception of beauty or taste, in any object whatever, throughout all nature and all art that imitates nature; and, in objects which differ from the human form, the principles must be in the extreme, because the object is then merely symbolical. Thus, the meekness of the lamb, and the high-spirited prancing steed; the gentle dove, and the impetuous eagle; the placid lake, and the swelling ocean; the lowly valley, and the aspiring mountain. It is the feminine character that is the sweetest, the most interesting, image of beauty; the masculine partakes of the sublime. Thus it
will

will be found, that, in every object that is universally pleasing, there exist principles which are analogous to those that constitute beauty in the human species; and that its appearance does always, in some degree, move the affections, though the mind may be unconscious of its similitude to any idea in which the affections are concerned. But the test of the object's possessing the principles of beauty is when we are able to assimilate its appearance with some amiable interesting affection; and, according as that affection prevails in the breast of the spectator, it will appear with an additional power of pleasing.

From association of ideas, any object may be pleasing, though absolutely devoid of beauty, and displeasing with it. The form is *then* out of the question; it is some *real* good or evil, with which the object, but not its form, is associated.

It is observable, that those animals I have mentioned (and I imagine all animals that are symbolical of our affections have the same) have a double character of beauty, or reference to the affection that is moved: i. e. their

their form and their disposition, exactly corresponding with each other. Probably on that union depends their power of pleasing; their *form alone*, so different from human beauty, could not sufficiently engage the attention, or afford the interesting perception, which the consistency of truth does, in the *intire* of an object.

Every object of taste has *at least* a double reference to mental pleasure, whether the object, in the philosophical scale of our perceptions, belongs to those of *sense* or *intellect*. Thus, the beauty of the rose would not certainly be so perceptible to us, wanting its fragrance, and, with a nauseous smell, would not probably be admitted, as I may say, into the rank of *agreeableness*, though it is in reality a beautiful and pleasing object; nor, supposing the thistle, or any other ugly flower, possessed of the fragrance of the rose, should we therefore think it an object of taste, any more than we can think the form of an elephant beautiful, though endued with almost intellectual beauty.

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In the form and colour of flowers, there appears to me a striking analogy to the character of human beauty. They afford an ocular demonstration, in the pleasure with which we contemplate their particular forms, that the pleasure, we receive from the beauty of the human form, originates from mental character: witness the charm of the infant, innocence of the snow-drop, of the soft elegance of the hyacinth, &c. and, on the contrary, our disrelish of the gaudy tulip, the robust, unmeaning, masculine, piony, hollyhock, &c. &c.

It is, I imagine, from a resemblance to some pre-conceived idea of beauty in the human species, that we are particularly pleased with the sight of one flower more than with another, though the mind is unconscious of the cause. And thus the pleasure, caused by the apparent beauty of every object throughout the system of human perception, is, according to my sentiment of that pleasure, the same intellectual principle, *moral good*, however diversified, modified, and diminished, even to an unconsciousness or almost imperceptible degree of

of relation to it. In fine, the true principles of beauty, in every object, may be all *resolved* into the same principle. But to conclude.

I have no more doubt that the principles of beauty are moral, than that the principles of happiness are moral. It is the perception of true beauty, in its various modifications, that makes up the sum of human happiness; and hence the diversity of opinions concerning beauty, but which, however diverse, are never contradictory, but as mens opinions in morals are so; for every view of beauty assimilates with some good, and of course must be in unison.

If, in the human system, there exists a principle which constitutes true pleasure, that principle must be that which constitutes human excellence; and, if the visible object which excites true pleasure must necessarily possess the principles of true pleasure, then must every object, which universally and invariably pleases, be relative to the principle that constitutes human excellence, morality.

Whatever appears, to each individual, the most excellent in the human system, at once

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constitutes his idea of *happiness*, of *morality*, and of *beauty*; and all mankind, I imagine, would agree in the same idea, had all the same opportunities of seeing and knowing what was excellent.

As I imagine the difference in national beauty is marked by the difference in national morals, so, of course, must the difference of the opinions of individuals on the subject of beauty be. In fine, as the moral sense of mankind is coarse or refined, so will be their taste of beauty.

Of this I am certain, that true refinement is the effect of true virtue; that virtue is truth, and good; and that beauty dwells in them, and they in her.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER III.

On *TASTE*.

TASTE seems to be an inherent impulsive tendency of the soul towards true good, given by nature to all alike, and which improves in its sentiment as the reasoning faculties improve in their knowledge of what is true good.

All the human faculties are, as one may say, constituents of the principle or faculty of taste. But its perception seems to be shared between the judgement and the imagination: to the former seems to belong the truth, or good, of an object of taste; to the latter its beauty or grace; and the *stamina vitæ*, or radical principles of taste, exist, I imagine, in the natural affections of the soul.

What the impulsive spring is, which moves the affections invariably to perceive pleasure in the perception of good and beauty, and disgust in the perception of evil or deformity, I leave to my metaphysical readers to determine.

I am afraid to give it an appellation so incongruous to the general idea of taste, as that of conscience.

Yet, however absurd it may appear, I will venture to say, that, if my readers will give themselves the trouble to analyse the grateful sensation or sentiment, we call *taste*, i. e. their sentiment of what is truly good, beautiful, right, just, ornamental, honourable, &c. &c. they will find it to originate from, and end in, some moral or religious principle. Indeed, some objects (the highest in the scale of our perceptions of excellence) bring with them an immediate conviction of the truth of this assertion; witness the devotional sentiment which the view of the main ocean inspires; the rising and setting sun; the contemplation of the celestial orbs, &c. witness the noblest object of the creation, when viewed in his highest character. Does not the perception of human excellence immediately relate to the source of all excellence?

The general diffusion of intellectual light, throughout mankind, constitutes rationality; and the aggregated excellence, or light of rationality,

tionality, constitutes morality. It is, I imagine, in this second or purified light, that taste begins to exist. It is at this period of cultivation that the mind begins to perceive its true good; that the natural affections rectify, methodize, and refine, in a word, become moral affections, through whose medium, i. e. the *moral sense*, the soul perceives every object of taste.

Taste is intellectual pleasure, an approving sense of truth, of good, and of beauty. The latter seems the visible or ostensible principle of the two former, and is that in which the universal idea of taste is comprised. All are pleased with the sight of beauty; but all are by no means sensible that the principles that make it pleasing, that constitute a form beautiful, are those, or, to be more intelligible, relate to those, that constitute man's highest excellence, his first interest, his chief good. Few, indeed, even among those who possess taste, if they have not accustomed themselves to investigate its principles, will readily conceive that they are thus deeply rooted in the mental frame. Indeed, the generality of mankind

kind seem rather to think that taste has no principles at all, or, if any, that they begin and end with the prevailing mode, fashion, &c. of the times; a notion which, though in the highest degree absurd, corroborates my opinion, that the universal perception of taste (the true and the false) exists in the idea of honour.

The compound word, or phrase, *le vrai idéal*, universally adopted to denote an object of taste, is the most exact and literal definition of its sentiment that can be conceived; for it implies the union of the judgement and the imagination, without which there could be no sentiment of taste. The judgement, as I observed, perceives the truth of the object, the imagination its beauty; they may be said to relate to each other, in the perception of an object of taste, as a luminous polish does to the substance from whence it proceeds: the substance can exist without its polish, but the polish cannot exist without its substance. The perception of taste seems to me, if I may so express myself, to be illusive, but not erroneous; in a word, to exist in our idea of true honour,

honour, i. e. in the polish, lustre, or ornament, of true virtue.

As the universal idea or sentiment of taste is honour, so the universal object of its perception is ornament, from the object, whose excellence we contemplate as an ornament or honour to human nature, to every object which in the slightest degree indicates the influence of that excellence. Take away the idea of that influence in the moral sphere, and taste is annihilated; and, in the natural sphere, take away the idea of divine influence, and taste cannot exist. Every sentiment of taste, as I observed before, ultimately relates to the one or to the other of these principles; indeed, strictly speaking, as the moral relates to the divine, it may be said ultimately to do the same.

In the progress of civilization, the polishing principle, which I call taste, is chiefly found in the highest sphere of life, highest both for internal and external advantages; wealth accelerates the last degree of cultivation, by giving efficacy to the principles of true honour; but it also accelerates its corruption,

ruption, by giving efficacy to the principles of false honour, by which the true loses its distinction, becomes less and less apparent, nay, by degrees, less and less real. Wealth becoming the object of honour, every principle of true taste must be reversed. Hence the *dire polish* of the obdurate heart, repelling the force of nature. Hence avarice and profusion, dissipation, luxurious banqueting, &c. supersede the love of œconomy, domestic comfort, the sweet reciprocation of the natural affections, &c. &c. Hence the greatest evils of society: the sorrows of the virtuous poor, *the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes*, in a word, the general corruption of morals, and, of course, of true taste!

The vulgar, who are strangers to the internal principles of honour, always annex their ideas of taste to the external appearances of the highest rank of life, which being easily acquired, particularly that of dress, the prevalency of modes and fashions, however absurd, is universally adopted. Those of false taste adopt them to attract notice; those of true taste, to avoid it. But, at this present, the difficulty
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of avoiding singularity in dress is, I imagine, much to be lamented by women of taste and virtue, the prevailing mode of feminine attire being diametrically opposite to every principle of feminine excellence; a melancholy proof of our being arrived at the last stage of depravity!

I could expatiate largely on this subject, but it would be inconsistent with my plan, which the reader may perceive, throughout the whole work, to be a mere outline only.

The three grand co-existing principles of taste, virtue, honour, and ornament, run through all its perceptions. Their triple union cannot be broken; but taste is nominally distinguished by the one or the other, according as its objects, situations, circumstances, &c. vary. Ornament and honour seem the public character of taste; virtue to be the private and domestic, where, though unperceived by the vulgar, to the eye of taste* she appears in her highest ornament, highest honour.

Taste seems to comprize three orders or degrees in its universal comprehension.

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* Truth can only judge itself. BACON.

The first is composed of those objects which immediately relate to the divinity, among which man claims the preeminence, when viewed in his highest character : witness the inexpressible charm which the natural virtuous affections of the soul inspire, when moved by some strong impulse, such as parental tenderness, filial piety, friendship, &c. &c. &c. Do they not unite the moral sentiment to the divine ?

The second is in the immediate external effects of true taste, or moral virtue, in the social sphere ; the order, beauty, and honour, which every object derives from its influence ; and, of course, its sentiment must be intimately related to moral excellence.

The third and last degree is general ornament and honour, appearing in fashions, arts of decoration, &c. &c. objects which seeming not immediately to affect the interests of humanity, the taste they exhibit in this sphere appears as an uncertain light, sometimes bright and sometimes obscured ; or rather as refracted rays of taste, broken by the general love of novelty and superfluity ; two principles which,
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though they are, to a certain degree, essential to exterior ornament, and the sentiment of true taste, are those in which taste always begins to corrupt. To illustrate my meaning: true ornament seems equally to partake of the idea of utility and superfluity, and every sentiment of taste seems equally to partake of the idea of novelty and of custom; for, were the object perfectly familiar to us, we should feel no degree of admiration, without which we could feel no sentiment of taste; and, were it totally new, unlike any thing we had ever seen, it would excite wonder instead of admiration, which is a sentiment as distant from taste as the love of fame is from the love of honour.

This sphere, the last in my scale of the perceptions of taste, and which borders upon every thing that is contrary to its laws, is properly the sphere of Fancy; who seems an undisciplined offspring of Taste; sometimes sporting within the bounds of parental authority, and sometimes beyond them. Fancy seems to bear the same affinity to Taste as Pleasure does to Happiness.

Every object of taste is relative to some principle of excellence from which it derives

its power of pleasing; of course, the highest sentiment of taste must exist in the relative principle to our highest object of excellence.

True ornament is, to the eye, what eloquence is to the ear: their principles throughout are one, the truth or beauty of which exists in its exact relation or adaptation to the object it adorns, constituting the *just*, the *true*, the *beautiful*, objects, or qualities, which, in the conscious eye of taste, *relate* to moral beauty. The perception of the first relation, i. e. the adaptation of any thing ornamental to the object it adorns, may, in a great measure, be learned by habit and general observation; but the higher relation, the second concoction (as one may say) of its principles, the moral relation, is the immediate operation of taste.

Ornament and harmonious sound are pleasing to the corporeal sense, but, when wanting a relative object, please but for a short time; and, if incongruously joined to an object, i. e. to one with which it can have no relation, will, as soon as the understanding perceives the incongruity, become a principle of disgust.

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As the virtues differ, in some degree, as the character of the sexes differ,* of course so must the sentiment of taste differ. To the man I would give the laws of taste; to the woman, its sensibility. The taste of the former seems more derived from reason; that of the latter from instinct: witness their impulsive maternal affection; that inherent ornament of their sex, modesty; their tender susceptibility of the benevolent virtues, pity, compassion, &c. &c.

Taste, however, is as far removed from mere instinct as from mere reason. I only mean to say, that the taste of the masculine character is rather on the side of reason, or the understanding; that of the feminine on the side of instinct, and, let me add, imagination. The taste of the one and of the other seems to differ as justice does from mercy, as modesty from virtue, as grace from sublimity, &c. &c. And, as exterior feminine grace is the most perfect visible object of taste, the highest degree of feminine excellence, externally and internally united, must of course constitute

* Vide page 23.

constitute woman, the most perfect existing object of taste in the creation.

The cultivation of the social moral affections is the cultivation of taste, and the domestic sphere is the true and almost only one in which it can appear in its highest dignity. It is peculiarly appropriated to feminine taste, and I may say it is *absolutely* the only one in which it can appear in its true lustre. True taste, particularly the feminine, is retired, calm, modest; it is the private honour of the heart, and is, I imagine, incompatible with the love of fame.

In the present state of society, taste seems to be equally excluded from the highest and from the lowest sphere of life. The one seems to be too much encumbered with artificial imaginary necessities; the other too much encumbered with the real and natural necessities of life, to attend to its cultivation. It is in the former that taste is universally thought to reside, which is because the idea of taste is inseparable from that of honour. It is that, indeed, in which the general taste of the nation is exhibited. It

is its *face*, as I may say, which expresses the internal character of the heart.

In this sphere, namely, the most exalted station of mankind, what true taste it does exhibit is placed in the strongest point of view; its contrary principles are also the same, particularly so to those who have been rightly educated at a distance from it; to such, the wrong will instruct as much as the right; but sure I am, that it is not, at this *period*, the proper sphere for the infant mind to expand and improve in. The wrong will be too familiar to the mind to disgust; and the right, which I imagine is chiefly confined to the *records* of taste in the fine arts, will be too remote (wanting the preparatory love of nature and virtue) to please.

It is not, I imagine, from objects of excellence in the arts, that the mind receives the first impressions of taste, though from them the impressions, we have already received, may be strengthened and improved. The truths they exhibit awaken the recollection of what has pleased us in nature; and we exult in the confirmation of our judgement and taste on find-
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ing those objects represented, by genius, in their best and fairest light. Of course, the excellence we perceive in the fine arts, which is always relative to moral excellence, must tend to the improvement of taste.*

But, though the arts are thus beneficial to the growing principles of taste, respecting a few individuals, it is well known that their establishment in every nation has had a contrary effect on the community in general; for, in proportion to the encouragement given them, as that encouragement immediately promotes two of the most pernicious principles that can affect the human heart, the most destructive of moral virtue, namely, the love of fame and the love of riches, the general diffusion of corruption must ensue, and of course the extinction of the natural principles of taste, or relish of the human soul of what is truly beautiful, truly honourable, truly good.

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* L'esprit de l'homme est naturellement plein d'un nombre infini d'idées confuses du vrai, que souvent il n'entrevoit qu'à demi; et rien ne lui est plus agréable, que lorsqu'on lui offre quelque-une de ces idées bien éclaircie et mise dans un beau jour. BOILEAU, Préface.

To conclude. I will not presume to say, that a man without taste is without virtue; but I think I may venture to say, that it is only as he can have virtue without loving virtue, that he can have virtue without having taste; the definition of taste being, according to my apprehension of its perception, the *love* of virtue. And, as that love springs from, and tends to, the source of all virtue, all good, may I not add, that it is but as a man can be religious without devotion, that a man can be religious without taste? the sentiment of devotion seeming to be, an aggregation of our most virtuous, most refined, conscious, energies of soul, in the awful vertical point ~~of~~ sublimity.

‘ From thee, great God, we spring, to thee we tend,
 ‘ Path, motive, guide, original, and end !’

JOHNSON.

THE END.

To conclude, I will not presume to say
that a man without life is without virtue; but
I think I may venture to say, that it is only as
he can have virtue without losing virtue, that
he can have virtue without being lost. -
definition of false being, according to my
understanding of the expression, and the
idea, as I understand it, and the
the truth, all virtue is good, and I
say, that it is a virtue, and can be
without exception, that a man can be
without loss of the elements of
feeling to be, an expression of
truth, and virtue, and
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THE END

